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NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Elliot Krieger, Communications – (401) 222-8471
Embargo until: Tuesday, September 27, 2011 @ 10:30 a.m.

Science test scores improve; 1 of 3 students achieves proficiency Rhode Island named a “lead state” to help develop Next Generation Science Standards

Nearly 1 of 3 Rhode Island students (32 percent) achieved proficiency on the 2011 NECAP science assessments, an improvement of 3 percentage points over last year’s results.

All students in grades 4, 8, and 11 took the assessments last May. Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist released the assessment results this morning (September 27) at a news conference at Mt. Hope High School, in the Bristol Warren School District.

Statewide, proficiency levels in 4th grade remained virtually the same as last year, at 43-percent proficient; 8th-graders improved by 3 points, to 25-percent proficient, and 11th-graders improved by 5 points, to 26-percent proficient.

Over the 3 years since the first New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) science assessments, scores in grade 4 have improved by 8 points, scores in grade 8 have improved by 7 points, and scores in grade 11 have improved by 9 points.

Though achievement gaps in science persist across Rhode Island, some student groups made significant gains, including Asian students (up 10 points in grade 8), economically disadvantaged students (up 2 points in grade 8 and up 3 points in grade 11), and students with disabilities (up 3 points in grade 11).

“I congratulate our Rhode Island teachers and our students for the improvements on the state science assessments,” said Governor Lincoln D. Chafee. “As we continue to move forward with our plan for transforming education in Rhode Island, we hope to see improvements every year – in English, mathematics, and science as well. I am confident that our students can compete with the best in New England and the best in the country.”

“Though I am pleased by the gradual improvement in science scores, I am concerned that only one-third of our student population has achieved proficiency in science,” said George D. Caruolo, Chairman of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education.

“Proficiency in science is essential if our students are to succeed in the high-technology fields that are likely to be the economic growth areas in Rhode Island. We are moving in the right direction, but we have a long road ahead as we strive to advance achievement for all students.”

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In addition to releasing the NECAP results, Commissioner Gist announced this morning that Rhode Island will be among a group of states working with Achieve, Inc., a nonprofit organization that helps states raise academic standards and graduation requirements, to develop the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). These new standards will clearly define the science content and practices students will need to learn from kindergarten through high school. As one of the Lead State Partners, Rhode Island will gather and deliver feedback from state-level committees, address common issues and challenges, and guide the process of writing the new standards.

The R.I. Department of Education (RIDE) will commit staff time to the initiative, and Commissioner Gist will convene education professionals into a State Leadership Team to provide insight and feedback throughout the process.

“In Rhode Island, we fully recognize the importance of science achievement for all students as they prepare for college and for challenging careers in our global economy,” said Commissioner Gist. “We are very excited to be working with Achieve and with the other Lead State Partners in developing new science standards that will guide our teaching and learning for years to come.”

“The Lead State Partners will provide important leadership and guidance throughout the development of the Next Generation Science Standards and are to be congratulated for making a strong commitment to improving science education,” said Michael Cohen, president of Achieve. “This will be a collaborative process that will lead to a set of standards that provides America’s students a strong foundation in science and supports college and career readiness for all.”

“Rhode Island has a strong history of commitment to science education, and Achieve is proud to work with the state as one of the lead state partners throughout the development of the NGSS,” said Jennifer Childress, Ph.D., Achieve senior science advisor.

Commissioner Gist held the news conference at Mt. Hope High School to recognize the significant improvement in its scores, up 17 points to 37-percent proficient. Last year, Mt. Hope reconfigured its science and mathematics departments under a single coordinator to fully integrate mathematics and science instruction.

Other schools and districts invited to the news conference were:

- East Greenwich High School, the highest-performing high school in the state in regard to science achievement and the first Rhode Island high school to have 60 percent of its students achieve proficiency or better;
- the East Providence School District, which showed significant gains at two grade levels both since last year’s assessments and since the first NECAP science assessments, in 2008;
- the Reservoir Avenue School, in Providence, which improved from 9-percent proficiency in 2008 to 33-percent proficiency this year; and
- the Westerly School District, which, like East Providence, showed significant gains in two grade levels, both since last year’s assessments and since the first NECAP science assessments.

Other districts that made significant gains both this year and over the past three years were Exeter-West Greenwich and Middletown (grade 11) and North Kingstown and South Kingstown (grade 8).

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“I want to congratulate the many schools and districts that are leading the way and that made significant progress this year on the NECAP science assessments,” Commissioner Gist said. “Today’s results clearly show that students from all schools and all backgrounds can meet challenging standards. Though today we are recognizing some schools and districts for the progress they have made, we expect to see significant gains in *every* district in the coming years. Our goal is to advance achievement for all students and to close achievement gaps across the state.”

The NECAP science assessments were developed in partnership and adopted by the Departments of Education in Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Vermont. The NECAP science assessments consist of multiple-choice, constructed-response, and inquiry task items on earth and space science, physical science, and life sciences.

For a complete report on the 2011 NECAP science scores, visit the RIDE Web site, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/assessment/Results.aspx>

For more information on the Next Generation Science Standards, see:

www.nextgenscience.org

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